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Centre for
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II Values and Behaviour

Entextualization as Migration

Stefan Groth

Stefan Groth took up his Post-doctoral Fellowship at the Centre having previously worked with the University of Göttingen's interdisciplinary Research Unit on Cultural Property. Dr Groth's research project at the Centre – on the theme 'Culture as Resource and Diplomacy: Between Geopolitics and Issues-based Policy' – aimed to make the construction, negotiation, definition, and legitimization of positions on cultural resources transparent at both structural and discursive levels. Following his year at the Centre and a period of research at the University of Bonn, Dr Groth is now a senior researcher at the University of Zurich's Department of Social Anthropology and Empirical Cultural Studies.

In multilateral negotiations, documents are key. Decisions, agreements, resolutions and meeting reports exist in written form, and much of their authority and binding force is derived from the permanence of documents, either on paper or in electronic form in virtual archives. There are, no doubt, many instances in multilateral or bilateral settings where arrangements to cooperate remain, for some reason or other, oral and undocumented. But documents and their ability to create a semblance of transparency, accountability, certainty, or traceability are treasured tokens of effectiveness and efficiency. Think of climate negotiations or peace talks: what is presented or what people seek to achieve at the end of drawn-out meetings or clinched deliberations comes in the form of paper, preferably signed by all parties involved. Or think of the effort that goes into the transcription and translation of oral statements delivered in negotiations to produce almost verbatim meeting reports. Such textual outcomes are then scrutinized by observers, analysed by policy experts or the media and, not least, examined by scholars who are interested in the process or content of negotiations. Indeed, the empirical material of many studies of multilateral negotiations consists mainly of documents in the form of reports, draft resolutions or other types of policy papers which are subjected to various types of 'document analysis'.

Yet, documents are textual representations of performance: they need to be produced first, and the conditions under which they are produced – the contexts of their emergence – are central factors which need to be taken into consideration when dealing with and analysing documents. What goes into documents is both the result of and subject to negotiation. Processes of negotiating and producing text are not limited

to content, but extend to performative aspects such as style, linguistic code, rhetoric, or genre. Further, these aspects can include the role of audiences present at the negotiating table. The composition of the audience matters to the ways actors talk, to their choice of words and to their formulations – even if the particular audience is not directly addressed. This can be for purposes of avoiding direct conflict, initiating cooperation by supporting statements made by other states, or by building pressure on opposing parties. Take, for example, the case of negotiations where indigenous groups are directly present as participants or observers: the linguistic registers used are likely to shift to acknowledge them as stakeholders or at least to be sensitive to normative claims voiced by these groups. In meeting reports reproducing statements and decisions of negotiations, this aspect is not necessarily visible, yet it can significantly shape discourse as well as the documents resulting from it.[1] Performances can further be directed at audiences not present during negotiations, such as civil society, domestic policy actors or other negotiation stakeholders. This is the case when arguments, terms or debates are primarily referred to for their potential influence on these non-present audiences and not on negotiations themselves. The functional goals of this can be to give an account of adhering to international standards, representing national interests or to make connections between different thematic issues. Directing statements at multiple audiences is one performative aspect of negotiations that can get lost when anchored speech acts are transferred to documents. Other performative aspects influencing debates can be related to the setting, time pressure, translation problems or events occurring in the context of negotiations.

All of these factors can influence the course and outcome of negotiations, yet their effects and importance are not directly conveyed in documents such as meeting reports. As performances are – as fragments of discourse – taken out of the context of their emergence, they are *entextualized*[2] in documents, gain mobility and are then able to migrate to other audiences or fora. While performances (such as making statements or drafting text in negotiations) are grounded in situational contexts and anchored in social situations, the process of entextualization creates documents as 'bounded objects'[3] not directly linked to their performative emergence. The specific context in which they were put forth in multilateral negotiations is thus, to some extent, erased. From an analytical standpoint, such processes of entextualization and decontextualization need to be scrutinized in order to understand how documents are produced and to what extent performative aspects shape negotiations.

Yet, entextualization can also be used as a strategy in multilateral negotiations. One such strategy is to put

[1] Groth, Stefan (2012). *Negotiating Tradition: The Pragmatics of International Deliberations on Cultural Property*, Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen.

[2] Bauman, Richard, and Briggs, Charles L. (1990). 'Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19: 59–88.

[3] Sung-Yul Park, Joseph, and Bucholtz, Mary (2009). 'Introduction. Public Transcripts: Entextualization and Linguistic Representation in Institutional Contexts', *Text & Talk* 29 (5): 485–502.

fragments of discourse 'on the record'. Using certain phrases and expressions in statements can serve as a point of reference or precedence which can be referred to later or in other fora. For example, by introducing definitions of issues under negotiation, these are entextualized in meeting reports; they can then 'migrate in time' and be referred back to as precedents at subsequent stages of negotiations to bolster an argument. Or policy concepts can be outlined in statements to point to their entextualized form in other institutions or domestic contexts. As they 'migrate in space', they gain authority through their occurrence in official documents on the international stage. The significance of such processes of entextualization as migration varies. Yet being reflected in official documents – be it through definitions, through policy concepts, or just by showing up in them – in any case creates legitimacy for delegates or organizations in multilateral negotiations as they can, for instance, prove that they have represented their member state or that they take part in international debates.

When dealing with documents in multilateral negotiations, the fact that discourse as text is made separable and migrates from one context to another by processes of entextualization and decontextualization needs to be taken into account. The context of the performative emergence of documents matters, both because it has an influence on documents as outcomes of multilateral negotiations, and because it is often used strategically. Documents are not intentions and decisions rendered into text, but rather products of performance in context. Performative aspects as well as processes of entextualization – as the migration of phrases, concepts and strategies in space and time – need to be traced to gain a deeper understanding of how such documents are produced, circulated and used.